Department	School of Computing
Supervisor	Dr Debbie Meharg
Project Title	Inclusion: Understanding the impact of higher education policy

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Higher education institutions in Scotland are legally bound to provide an inclusive learning environment. Tinklin & Hall (1999) conducted a study to explore the experiences of disabled students in Scottish higher education institutions. Although they concluded that some steps were being made towards the inclusion of students, there was still a long way to improve the experience for students with disabilities. 18 years later, Moriña (2017) explored the inclusivity in higher education. The conclusions of the study point out that there is a series of transformations needed at both, the institutional and policy level, to ensure an inclusion of all students in all activities of student life.

Most of the available literature on students with disabilities focuses on improving curriculum, access to materials and help with exams/time management. However, very little is known how disabilities affect other aspects of student's lives, such as extra-curricular activities, socialisation and attending events, such as Fresher's week. Wessel et al. (2009) identified that universities experience a high dropout rate of students with disabilities in the first weeks of the trimester. The first six weeks of the trimester are considered crucial as it is during that time that students feel most susceptible to feeling left out (Tinto, 1988).

This project will research how students are affected by their disabilities when choosing their areas of studies and explore levels of inclusions effect on success. Research questions may include: Can the Scottish higher education policy be affected to improve the levels of inclusion for disabled students?

Prospective applicants are encouraged to contact the supervisor before submitting their applications. Applications should make it clear the project you are applying for and the name of the supervisors.

Academic qualifications
A first degree (at least a 2.1) ideally in education or STEM area with a good fundamental knowledge of education and policy.

English language requirement
IELTS score must be at least 6.5 (with not less than 6.0 in each of the four components). Other, equivalent qualifications will be accepted. Full details of the University's policy are available online.

Essential attributes:
- Experience of fundamental concepts surrounding higher education policy and research areas
- Competent in qualitative research techniques such as interviewing, document analysis and focus groups.
- Knowledge of or interest in education policy
- Good written and oral communication skills

- Strong motivation, with evidence of independent research skills relevant to the project
- Good time management

Desirable attributes:
Practical experience in qualitative and/or quantitative research methods, awareness of issues and problems surrounding accessibility in higher education and policy considerations.

Indicative Bibliography	Commissioner for Fair Access. (2019). *Discussion paper: Disabled Students at University*. The Scottish Government. https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/independent-report/2019/02/commissioner-fair-access-discussion-paper-disabled-students-university/documents/commissioner-fair-access-discussion-paper-disabled-students-university/commissioner-fair-access-discussion-paper-disabled-students-university/govscot%3Adocument/00545770.pdf Moriña, A. (2017) Inclusive education in higher education: challenges and opportunities, *European Journal of Special Needs Education,* 32:1, 3-17, DOI: 10.1080/08856257.2016.1254964 Scottish Government statistics. (2017). *Long-term Monitoring of Health Inequalities*. The Scottish Government. https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20180519112114mp_/http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0051/00515868.pdf Tinklin, T., & Hall, J. (1999). Getting round obstacles: Disabled students' experiences in higher education in Scotland, *Studies in Higher Education,* 24:2, 183-194, DOI: 10.1080/03075079912331379878 Tinto, V. (1988). Stages of Student Departure: Reflections on the Longitudinal Character of Student Learning. *The Journal of Higher Education* 59 (4): 438–455, DOI: 10.2307/1981920 Wessel, R. D., Jones, J. A., Markle, J. & Westfall, C. (2009). Retention and Graduation of Students with Disabilities: Facilitating Student Success. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability* 21 (3): 116–125.
Enquiries	For informal enquiries about this PhD project, please contact d.meharg@napier.ac.uk
Web page	https://www.napier.ac.uk/research-and-innovation/research-degrees/application-process